

# CHURCH UNION

## NEWS AND VIEWS

NOVEMBER 1956



# CHURCH UNION

## NEWS AND VIEWS

(New Series)

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Organ of the Negotiating Committee for Church Union in  
North India and Pakistan

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# Church Union

## News and Views

(New Series)

### Preparing for Decision

**T**HE Continuation Committee met in Allahabad for three days in the middle of October 1956. Its task was mainly to receive the reports of the various Sub-Committees which have been at work since the Negotiating Committee met in August 1955, and to incorporate the fruits of their labours in a draft revision of the Plan of Union which it is hoped may form the third and final edition of the Plan. Arrangements have now been made for the full Negotiating Committee itself to meet for four full days in the first week of April 1957. It is our prayer that in this meeting an edition of the Plan may be agreed upon in such a form that the Negotiating Churches may be asked to give their verdict upon it, and thus open the way to the consummation of Union.

The principle change which has been introduced is the re-arrangement of the Plan which is fully explained by the Rev. E. L. Wenger elsewhere in this issue. The members of the Continuation Committee wholeheartedly agree with his estimate of the improvement thus made, and it is believed that we now have a document which, whatever defects may remain, presents a conception of the Church and its vocation which is worthy of the most careful attention by all concerned.

The reports of the Committees on Membership and on The Unification of the Ministry which have already appeared in these pages (see Church Union : News and Views, May and August 1956) were endorsed without alteration. On the other hand the comments received from West Pakistan on the proposals for a General Synod and Regional Synods were so far reaching that it does not seem likely that this particular method of securing the autonomy, within the one Church, of Churches in the two countries will be found suitable. It remains true that members of the Churches in both countries desire to reach Union on a single Plan, but a final decision on the relation between the

United Churches in the two countries will depend on the verdict which the Continuation Committee has requested the Church in Pakistan to give before April 1957.

Many practical questions remain to be worked out before the actual Union is consummated. Some of these may be dealt with during the period between decision for Union, and the Union itself but there are other on which it would be helpful to see the pattern of solution at an early stage. Of these, one of the most urgent is that of the likely Diocesan boundaries in the Church after Union.

On this matter it is urgently necessary to have the considered opinion of responsible people who have thought the matter through together in the various regions. Only in the light of such opinion can a central committee draw up a feasible plan for the Church as a whole. A good lead has been given by West Bengal, West Pakistan and Uttar Pradesh but it is very much hoped that no time will be lost in getting to work on this problem in the other areas concerned.

At the October meeting the Continuation Committee welcomed as negotiators representatives of the Church of the Brethren in Gujarat who had accepted the invitation of the Negotiating Committee to join them on this basis. Observers were also present from the Council of Baptist Churches in Assam and Manipur as well as from the American Baptist Mission in Orissa. These were fresh tokens of the widening interest which is being taken in the Plan of Union among the Christian people of our countries. They remind us that the task in which we are engaged is one of urgency. All who have taken part in these negotiations are thankful to God for His leading thus far on the way, and we again call upon all concerned to study what has been prepared, and to pray for right judgment and decision in all the Churches in the months ahead.

## Re-Arranging the Plan

REV. E. L. WENGER

**I**N THE course of work done by various sub-committees it became clear for several reasons that a re-arrangement of the Plan of Union was necessary. The present arrangement had grown up naturally out of the historical process in which the Round Table Conference first prepared a Basis for Union and then the Negotiating Committee began to draft the Constitution of the Church which should be the result of that Union. Inevitably this led to repetition in the Plan. To avoid such repetition references were made in some places (but not in all) from the Constitution to the Basis or vice versa. When new clauses were added they were placed sometimes in the Basis sometimes in the Constitution and sometimes in both. When clauses were amended the amendments were not always made *pari passu* in both Basis and Constitution. Though differences between the Basis and Constitution were mostly verbal, in one case at least the difference was more substantial. Further, if one wished to find out what the Plan had to say on any particular matter it was not at first sight easy to tell whether one had to look in the Basis or in the Constitution or to look in both and build up a composite answer.

The proposal therefore was made to make a conflation of the Basis and Constitution to form a single unitary statement. This would be the permanent Constitution of the United Church (now named the Church of North India and Pakistan) followed by another part in which would be set out all the proposals for the method of inauguration of Union, and for such temporary arrangements as were necessary for the period immediately after Union while the process of growing together continued. A further part, still to be prepared, could include rules for finance and administration. The whole—consisting of the permanent Constitution and the initial or temporary provisions—would together form the Basis for Union.

I had the privilege of being entrusted with making the draft re-arrangement, but I was greatly assisted by the helpful suggestions of the leaders of other delegations. In particular the Rev. W. Stewart prepared the new draft on the Ministry of the Laity, since it had

seemed to the sub-committee that the relevant sections had included more detail than was needed for a Constitutional document.

The new draft then has done the following things :

1. It has conflated the Basis and Constitution and made omissions only of what was repetitive. No omission of substance has been made.
2. It has redrafted the section on the Laity; it has usually substituted the name "The Church of North India and Pakistan" instead of the phrase "the uniting Churches" or "the united Church"; and it has made a few verbal changes consequent on the re-arrangement (such changes being marked in the draft). One or two sections have been added from the Ceylon Plan by way of suggestion.

3. It has made a re-arrangement, so that the Plan reads with a certain purposiveness, a kind of marching progress.

The re-arrangement and the verbal changes together with other verbal amendments proposed will be considered by the Continuation Committee.\*

This work of re-arrangement has meant coming to pretty close grips with the Plan. The first tentative draft in outline, then the work with scissors and paste, followed by further changes of order, and then the work of typing it out on to the stencils was a labour which brought its own reward in a strange spiritual thrill. As the chapters unfolded :—Name, the nature of the Church and its membership, the doctrines the Worship, and the Sacraments of the Church, then the Priesthood of all believers, followed by the Ministry, both of the Laity and the Ordained Ministry, leading on then to Polity and the practical issues of the Church's life in Discipline and the Marriage Law, then affirming the links of the Church with the other Churches with which it maintains Communion, and strongly asserting the Autonomy of the Church free from State or other control, and in the final chapter on the 'Alterations to the Constitution acknowledging its readiness to grow as God may direct it,—as all these chapters unfolded

\*Written in early October.

who could not but be stirred by a sense of the privilege, which it is hoped to be ours, to belong to such a Church with such a Faith with such an Order and with such a Life. Here is no dead Constitution of Rules and Regulations, but a spiritual document that breathes with life. The practical rules are the outcome of a theological vision of the true nature of the Church of Jesus Christ. There are tensions in it, recognitions of differences held sincerely and tenaciously, but with mutual forbearance, until the Spirit of God shall lead us in fellowship to deeper understanding of His ways. Not that I am completely happy with every single phrase, (how could such a miracle of comprehension be achieved at once?—and in any case there must always be diversity of opinions while men are fallible men) but the points where reservations arise are so few compared with the great range of deep agreement that I can rejoice with all my heart. And the differences are not held together by uneasy compromise, however much that may seem to be the case to those who view it from the outside. There

is a sense of having already learned much from one another, there is an expectancy of yet greater things to learn from God in fellowship with one another.

As a Baptist I look at the Plan with some wistfulness. Baptists have very little use for formal statements of Church Order: but how much our Churches in India and Pakistan have suffered for lack of teaching on what the Church is, for lack of authoritative guidance on how the Church should order its affairs under the guidance of God. What a wealth of truth there is here for us to draw from.

But I wonder. Many as they look at the Plan allow a few "flaws" (as they seem to them) to loom so large that they miss the grandeur of the picture as a whole. May I hope that the Plan in its new form will be read in a new light and with a new perspective and be seen for what it is:—not just a Constitution of human contriving, but something inspired by the Holy Ghost, holding the promise of a Church which in India and Pakistan shall be Christ's indeed.

## The Imperatives of Church Unity

JOHN W. SADIQ

THE Church situation in India today is often compared with the Church situation in the early centuries of the Greco-Roman world. Undoubtedly there are points of similarity: for example, the existence of an ancient but living culture, the mystic pantheism and the consequent syncretism in much of the surrounding religious thought and the social cleavage between the high and the low. But the state of the Church which faced the situation then was very different from the one with which it faces the situation in India now. Then, one could speak of the Church. Now, one can only speak of the churches. And this makes a world of difference. In fact one is reminded more of post-Reformation Europe and the later Church history in the Western world, particularly the United States of America. From the former India has inherited the divisions following the Reformation, and from the latter she continues to receive sectarian tendencies. When, for instance, a disciple of

Christ, in his ignorance, calls himself 'an American Dutch Reformed Indian Christian', we have reached the verge of the ludicrous. And yet it is in much of such condition that the Church has to live and carry out 'the titanic task of the winning of India for Christ'.

The disrupted and divided Church produces some strange and tragic situations. Let us take one or two instances. A young Hindu convert, who, after a long search after truth, had accepted Christ, tells of one of his early experiences in these words, "I will never also forget the sad and the most unpleasant experience I had in my life once. Some ten years ago, I had the rare privilege of conducting a big mass meeting on a Sunday morning in a big city in South India. Hundreds of people were present and the whole service was left in my hands. This was followed by the Holy Communion service. As I belonged to another Church, I had to leave this Church and come away with a sad and heavy heart. In the sermon I spoke of service for our country,

and union and fellowship and love for our countrymen, but in the very next minute I found that I could not put them into practice. I had to damp the Spirit of God that was moving me and was compelled to disobey 'the voice of God'. I mean the conscience that was pressing me from within, I felt I was kicked out of God's presence for the simple mistake of not being a member of that Church, for which I was not, in any sense, responsible. There I realized that 'Church' stands between a sinner and God.' The tragedy of this story lies in the fact that a Christian to whom our Lord had said, 'Come unto me and I will refresh you', had been 'kicked out of God's presence', and equally in the fact that in his experience the Church stood between a sinner and God inspite of its claim to be the bearer of the Gospel of Reconciliation. Or let us recall 1935, when a great conference of the depressed class people at Nasik decided that they would no longer remain in the Hindu fold but would seek some other religious fellowship. But when one of our Bishops approached the leader, he retorted, "At present we are one community all over India, and our strength is in our unity. Can you in the Christian Church offer us any unity comparable to that? Have you one body that we can join as one people?" The great opportunity passed. The divisions of the Church slammed the door on a people seeking life abundant.

We cannot take shelter under the belief that invisibly the Church is one. It is true that the Church cannot but be one for Christ is not divided. But to cover our denominations by an appeal to this belief is a subterfuge. Someone has caustically pointed out that this invisible unity is 'not apparent to the world and not effective when practical issues have to be faced. It is a spirit without a body. Disembodied spirits do not play a large part in the life of the modern man!'

Sometimes the churches are compared to an orchestra playing in harmony under one leader. Would it not be more realistic to think of several orchestras, each playing its own tune in its own way? There are two hymns which we often sing in our Church services, 'The Church's one Foundation,' and 'Onward Christian Soldiers'. I often wonder whether we feel a lump in our throat as we sing :

One holy Name she blesses,  
Partakes one holy food.  
or  
We are not divided,  
All one body we.

Are we not like caste-ridden groups that eat the same food but from different tables, and are we not being dishonest when we do not penitently confess our divisions?

Perhaps the divisions of the Church were inevitable, but that does not make them justifiable. Much might be said about the various aspects of the Christian truth that the denominations have preserved, and much might be said about the variety of devotional life they have inspired or about the missionary efforts that they have engendered. But may we not attribute these to the providence of God, who brings good out of evil and turns the wrath of man to His praise? What God in His mercy has been able to accomplish through the churches is surely not so much because of, but in spite of divisions. His mercy is always the other side of His judgement.

There can thus be no two opinions about the sinfulness of divisions. The Lambeth Conference of the Anglican bishops in 1920 said these words, "We acknowledge this condition of broken fellowship to be contrary to God's will, and we desire frankly to confess our share in the guilt of thus crippling the Body of Christ and hindering the activity of His Spirit." Shall we then continue to sin that grace may abound? Shall we continue to gamble over Christ's seamless robe? The confession of sin is the beginning of Christian wisdom, and it is one of the imperatives of Church unity.

### Our Obedience

From this rather negative approach, let me pass on to a more positive consideration. The essence of Christian discipleship is love and obedience to Christ our Lord. "Lovest thou me?" "Follow thou me." The final court of appeal on this question of unity is therefore the will of Christ. And how do we discover His will?

There are five universally accepted ways of knowing the will of Christ for his Church. These put in the form of questions will be,

"Who and What is Christ?", "What has he said?", "What has he done?", "What did those who were closer to Him think and do?", and "What does His Holy Spirit say to us today in our situation?". A few words in answer is all that is possible here, but should help the argument of this article.

We all believe that our Lord stands at the centre of God's redemptive acts in history. In Him the Church the new Israel, had its beginning and has become part of God's plan for the world. "The Church carries on the life of Christ" said a convert, and there can hardly be a better definition of the Church. But if it is to carry on that Life then it must conform in some degree to that Life. And the Lord made no secret of His desire that the unity between Him and His people and between these people themselves was to be in some measure like the unity within the God-head. The Evanston report has put this truth in these words: "The New Testament conceives of the unity of the Church not as sociological but as having its essential reality of Christ Himself, and His indissoluble unity with His people." Our divisions make nonsense of God's purposes in Christ.

The answer to the second question cannot be given better than in the high-priestly prayer of our Lord recorded in St. John 17, where three times over the Lord prays that His people may be one; for it is in this oneness that they can carry out their mission to make Him known. "If the Church" said the Willingen Conference, "is to demonstrate the Gospel in its life as well as in its preaching, it must manifest to the world the power of God to break down barriers and to establish the Church's unity in Christ." Disunity falsifies the spoken and expressed desire of the Master for His Church.

"What has Christ done?" He has formed a fellowship, humanly constituted but divinely supported, demonstrating the relation between the vine and the branches. In order that the branches may recognise the source of their sustenance and may bring forth fruit, He instituted the Communion of His Body and Blood. In instituting that great Sacrament He gave them to eat out of one bread and gave them one cup saying—'Drink ye all of this'. This was to be an eternal seal and symbol of His oneness with

them and of their oneness with one another. In that oneness they were to carry on His life. "Christ called His Apostles that they might be one with Him and with one another, and that He might send them forth, to share with Him His mission for the redemption of the world." (Willingen).

Regarding the fourth question, we are left in no doubt as to what the Apostles thought and did in regard to Christ's will in this matter. The moving scenes recorded at the end of the second and fourth chapters of the Book of Acts provide a sufficient evidence. St. Paul from whom the Church has received the words of the Institution of the Holy Communion, follows these words with an exhortation on unity climaxing it with the words, 'Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular,' and then sings the great hymn of love which puts to shame our 'vested interests in disunity'.

Finally, the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It has been well said that His two gifts on the Day of Pentecost were community and communication. These are reminiscent of our Lord's prayer 'that they may all be one... that the world may believe.' The Holy Spirit was given to the Church to carry on its mission with power and anything that hinders, obstructs or weakens that mission cannot be of the Holy Spirit. Nor will He say to us anything in contradiction to that with which He sent out the Church into the world. Our continued disunity is a denial of the power of the Holy Spirit, or is it defiance?

The concern for unity is not the fad of a few enthusiasts, nor an expediency to meet the exigencies of the present situation. It is rooted in the very being of God and His purposes as revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ and in the activity of his Holy Spirit. In the peculiar circumstances in which God has placed His Church in India, the concern for unity comes into bolder relief precisely because it is derived from God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The Church in India is today on the verge of a great opportunity to commend the Gospel to the hearts and consciences of her people who desperately need the Gospel of Reconciliation. It stands on the threshold of a new lease of life—a life rooted in Christ but related to the soil, bound at the same time to a world-wide fellowship which knows no man-made barriers. The very circumstances of difficulties and

opportunities are beckoning it to leave behind the burdens of past unhappy divisions and to press forward to the high calling of 'mission and unity' through the power of the spirit under whose dispensation it exists. Writing in 1929 about the church Union negotiations in South India, the late Bishop Palmer of Bombay said, "Certainly twice in the recent negotiations in South India between the South India United Church and the Anglican Church it seemed, when we met, that we were sure to separate and give up our task, but there was a power behind us which we all felt, and that power was pressing us together. It was as if we were young and wayward children, and He was very quietly saying: "Children, children, you

must agree."...We recognise that the primary motive of all our efforts is not anything that arises in our own hearts or brains; it is not a calculation of advantage nor is it a consideration of the needs of the Indian field. The motive is the Spirit, and that is the one force which keeps our faces towards unity."

To sum up, the need for confessing our sins of disunity is one imperative of unity. Even more important is the will of Christ which the Holy Spirit reveals to us today with a constraint that we cannot evade, and a pressure that we dare not resist.

In Christ's will is our peace. We must unite or perish.

## Ordination in the Proposed Church of North India and Pakistan

REV. T. S. GARRETT

**I**F I may be permitted to begin on a personal note, it was a particular joy to me during my stay in North India from November 1955 to February 1956 to be invited to take part, as a member of the Liturgy Committee of the Church of South India, in the work of a sub-committee of the Negotiating Committee of C. N. I. & P. appointed to prepare ordination services for the coming united Church. The tentative order for the ordination of Presbyters which we drafted together has already borne fruit in the Church of South India which was in process of revising its ordinal at the same time. An ordination service is a theological issue as much as a liturgical one, and when the C. S. I. Theological Commission met in April, this draft service was presented to it together with work done hitherto by the C. S. I. Liturgy Committee. The result was the Commission's recommendation that in the drafting of the crucially important ordination prayers for Deacons and Bishops as well as Presbyters, work should proceed according to the pattern of the North Indian draft.

The earlier part of the North Indian draft—presentation of candidates, litany, collect, readings from the Bible, examination of

candidates—has been taken with some modifications from the South Indian rite which is now to be superseded, and it is suggested in the introduction that the South Indian Order for the Lord's Supper should be authorized for use with it. In the end, the draft which was presented for the ordination of Presbyters (and in a lesser degree those for the ordination of Deacons and Bishops) to the C. S. I. Liturgy Committee at its meeting of September 13th—17th, 1956 was, with a few modifications, mainly necessitated by differences of wording and emphasis in the two constitutions, to all intents and purposes the same as the North Indian tentative draft for ordination of Presbyters.

Thus there has been a useful give and take between the existing Church of the South and the coming Church of the North. One must go further and admit that the C.S.I. Liturgy Committee submitted the draft services which were presented to it to some fairly trenchant criticism, more with regard to questions of wording than of matter, and has redrafted them in several places. Neither draft is yet in its final form, the C. S. I. Committee having postponed final decision till next year. Perhaps North India will give the South the

benefit of its criticisms and suggestions, and maybe adopt some of the changes which South India has made in the draft for inclusion in its own services. To my mind the majority of these changes are undoubtedly stylistic improvements. But whether the Northern and the Southern work are further assimilated to each other or not, there will be no doubt that the two drafts, if they are finally accepted in anything like their present form, are 'first cousins'; and this will be a valuable symbol in the future that the two united Churches, when both are in being, are autonomous provinces of one united Church.

To come to the service itself, as drafted at Serampore last January; after the opening part of the Communion Service (down to the end of 'The Preparation', if the C.S.I. Lord's Supper is used) the candidates are presented to the Bishop. This, as the introduction says, is the last step in the process of choice of them by the Church. The recommendation of the appropriate committee that they should be ordained, the call of the congregation and the resolution of the committee appointing them to that charge are read. The Bishop asks the people present if there is any impediment, and if none is voiced, the whole congregation, as representing the People of God in the diocese, rise and say 'They are worthy,' using an ancient formula of the Eastern Churches.

Our Lord prayed before he chose his apostles and it was apostolic practice to lay on hands with prayer. Next therefore comes a litany or extempore prayer for the Church, including those to be ordained, and for the world at large.

After the readings from the Bible and the Sermon, the candidates are examined as to their faith, motives and intentions in the ministry they are about to undertake. This part is a combination of elements derived from the Scottish Book of Common Order and, through C. S. I., mostly from Anglican sources. I do not know why at this point the word 'Bishop' in the rubrics is changed to 'Presiding Officer'. Can it be that some sections of the negotiating churches in North India do not like the word 'Bishop'? If so, would it be reasonable to suggest that they translated the ugly phrase 'presiding officer' into Greek as *episcopos*? Some of the unwelcome associations of the word 'priest' have been avoided by the use of its similarly ancient Greek equivalent, 'presbyter'.

The act of ordination begins with a prayer for the presence of the Holy Spirit in the form of a hymn, either the medieval hymn which has had long association with ordination, *Veni Creator Spiritus* suitably translated, or better still, as recommended in a footnote, an Indian lyric with the same intent.

It is a debatable point whether this should be followed by 'Lift up your hearts...' These two versicles said or sung by the Bishop with the responses of the people have the advantage of linking ministers and people together in this act of ordination and are a reminder that the call and commissioning of a minister takes place in heaven to which we lift up our hearts. But they really belong to the Lord's Supper and were only added to ordination in the Western Church of the Middle Ages in order to give ordination a sacramental status on a par with Baptism and the Mass. In inserting them the sub-committee was doubtless influenced by the fact that recent revisions of the Anglican Prayer Book and the Scottish Book of Common Order, following the lead of the Anglican liturgist, the late Bishop Frere, have reintroduced them here. But a Roman liturgist, Fr. Bligh S. J., has recently argued that they do not properly belong here. To say these words at this point rather spoils their effect at the culmination of the service in the Lord's Supper, and the Church of South India has doubtless been right in leaving them out.

The ordination prayer which follows has three parts: 1. the remembrance of God's action through Christ in founding the Church and appointing the ministry, which is the scriptural basis for ordination. The passage particularly referred to is from Ephesians 4.

2. The prayer which accompanies the laying on of hands and which is repeated for each ordinand while Bishop and Presbyters lay their hands on his head:

"Send down thy Holy Spirit upon this thy servant, whom we, in thy name, and in obedience to thy most blessed will, do now, by the laying on of our hands, ordain and appoint to the office and work of Presbyter in the Church of God, committing unto him authority to minister thy Word and Sacraments, to declare thy forgiveness to penitent sinners, and to shepherd thy flock."

Perhaps it is worth quoting the form agreed to by the Liturgy Committee of the C. S. I. as an example of the kind of stylistic

improvement that South India has attempted in dealing with the same draft :

" Send down thy Holy Spirit upon thy servant N. whom we, in thy name, and in obedience to thy most blessed will, do now ordain Presbyter in thy Church, committing unto him authority to minister thy Word and Sacraments, to declare thy forgiveness to penitent sinners, and to shepherd thy flock."

Two points in this prayer deserve special note ; firstly that, as in all episcopal ordinations of Presbyters present share with the Bishop in ordination by laying on their hands. There is no episcopal church in which Presbyters are not thus associated with the Bishop.

Secondly, following the form in the Book of Common Order and other non-Anglican ordination services, it is a revival of the primitive tradition of performing the act of ordination with prayer to God rather than with a separate imperative formula, 'Receive the Holy Ghost for the office and work of a priest.....' which is the Anglican adaptation

of the Roman medieval formula. Here Anglican liturgists (and of course the Eastern Churches) will agree with us in regarding this as the primitive and scriptural tradition and as constituting a right and adequate form of ordination.

3. The conclusion of the prayer which asks for grace in various aspects for the newly ordained to fulfil their ministry.

This is followed by the presentation of a Bible, as a sign that this is the authority and basis of all their ministerial work, and the giving of the right hand of fellowship, as a token that they will minister in fellowship with their fellow ministers and, indeed, with the whole Church. The Service of the Lord's Supper then proceeds to its conclusion. It is clearly right that ordination should take place during the course of this act which our Lord commanded, for it is thereby made evident that ordination is an act of the whole Church and is sealed by our meeting together at the Table of the Lord.

## How Church Union Appears to Assam.

RIGHT REV. JOSEPH AMRITANAND.

WE ARE told that there are as many non-Roman Christians in Assam as there are in the whole of the rest of North India.

Also it seems that there are many more denominations and missionary Societies working in Assam than in any one of the States of North India. But only a minority of them is negotiating for Church Union.

### The Churches in Assam

I would like to classify the Christian Community in Assam in three groups.

#### 1. The Negotiating Churches.

I. The Presbyterian Church—supported by Welsh Presbyterian Mission and affiliated to the United Church of Northern India.

Communicant Membership—82,883.

II. The Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon—supported by the Society of The Propagation of the Gospel.

Communicant Membership—6,500.

III. Eastern Himalayan Church Council—United Church of Northern India.

Communicant Membership—4,983.

#### 2. Interested in the study of Church Union through Assam Christian Council.

I. Council of Baptist Churches in Assam and Manipur—supported by American Baptist Mission.

Communicant Membership—1,38,312.

An observer was sent to the meeting of the Negotiating Committee in Allahabad in 1955.

II. South Lushai Baptist Church—supported by Baptist Missionary Society.

III. North Bank Baptist Association—supported by American Baptist Mission.

Communicant Membership—6,188.

IV. Ebenezer Evangelical Lutheran Church supported by Norwegian Mission to Santals.

Communicant Membership—4,668.

V. Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church.  
Communicant Membership—8,307.

VI. Tripura State Baptist Union—supported by New Zealand Baptist Mission.  
Communicant Membership—3,200.

VII. Goalpara Boro Baptist Church—supported by Australian Baptist Mission.

Communicant Membership—2,004.

VIII. Church of God.

Communicant Membership—942.

IX. Church of God (Ka Turoi Gospel)  
Communicant Membership—433.

3. **Not affiliated to A. C. C. : Communicant Membership not known.** They are of fairly recent introduction and are not fully co-operating on comity basis.

I. Seventh Day Adventists—supported by American Mission.

II. Mid-Mission—supported by American Mission.

III. Church of Christ—supported by American Mission.

The up to date figures of the Communicant Membership is not available, but the figures stated give us the comparative strength of the various bodies affiliated to The Assam Christian Council.

These figures also indicate that a large portion of the Christians in Assam is not as yet keenly linked with the Plan of Church Union. And if effective union is to be worked out in Assam, a good deal of contact is required between the Negotiating Committee and these bodies, to take them into confidence so that they may also send delegates for negotiation.

At present only the Presbyterian Church affiliated to The United Church of Northern India and The Church of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon in Assam are associating with Church Union negotiations.

But I understand that The Presbyterian Church here has not had much communication with The United Church of Northern India on the matter of Church Union; and the impression that I have received—I am open to correction—is that the members of the Presbyterian Church in Assam are not fully convinced to the extent that U.C.N.I., has gone with the plan of Church Union.

As the Presbyterian Church in Assam is a large portion of the U.C.N.I., it is very essential that active steps should be taken to carry it with the rest so that each section of the negotiating churches may be ready to accept the basis of the union, when the plan is finally referred to them for acceptance.

I hope and pray that the U.C.N.I. will take this situation seriously, and keep in touch with the Presbyterian Church in Assam regarding the development in the field of Church Union.

I am afraid, without the Presbyterian Church here, not only Church Union in Assam but also in the rest of North India would not be of great value.

#### The Growth of Co-operation

However, I am glad to say that we have grown together to such an extent in the A. C. C. that there is mutual respect towards each other's work, which is expressed in the following Resolution and Report of the Church Union Committee of A.C.C. in 1952.

"Resolved that the "Form of Commendation" be brought to the attention of all affiliated bodies, with the request that the report and the form of Commendation be translated into the languages of the various areas".

"This FORM is a commendatory and protective one. We are all familiar with cases when a person excommunicated from or under discipline in a certain Church, seeks admission to membership in another. The use of this form of commendation would prevent such irregularities as no one under discipline would be able to possess a certificate.

While it is desirable that free movements amongst all the bodies represented on the Assam Christian Council should be encouraged, the committee would impress on the Council the great importance of discouraging active proselytising or attempts to convert persons from membership of one body to another as this fosters ill feeling.

Again, as stated in the 1951 report of this committee, we urge upon the Council the primary importance of all the affiliated bodies confining themselves to their first task, viz. the proclamation of the Gospel to non-Christians.

Therefore we appeal to all to refrain from all attempts to convert members from their allegiance to one body or another. The use by all of the "Form of Commendation" approved in 1950 will cover all cases of those who for reason of conscience or their feelings concerning faith, teaching and worship, desire to transfer their allegiance from one affiliated body to another; also those who either temporarily or permanently are isolated from the spiritual ministrations of their own Church, and desire to avail themselves of the spiritual hospitality of the Church where now they reside.

It is, further, reaffirmed that this Form of Commendation is not intended to override the faith and order of any receiving Church.

This committee, in conclusion, would bring to the notice of the Council that the Second Revision of the Plan of Union for North India is about to be issued. It is commended for study".

Sincere application of the above resolution has brought about better understanding among the affiliated bodies. But the greatest step to bring us together is the establishment of Union Christian College in 1952. This has led us into a very deep experience of happy Co-operation. The affiliated bodies are contributing financially towards the maintenance of the College and we have staff and students representing nearly every affiliated body. This is surely a very effective stepping stone towards Union.

Another factor that needs mentioning is the Co-operative worship of various denominations at Dibrugarh, Silchar, Dhubri and Digboi. At these places members of various denominations have joined together to have united worship and the ministers of these denominations have arranged to conduct services in turn and happily co-operated to administer sacraments to their respective members. I have noticed a hundred per cent co-operation according to the Resolution of A.C.C., among such groups who have learned to worship together, and feel certain that this gradually cultivated habit of growing together will help to bring full Union nearer.

At Dibrugarh the situation is expected to be the happiest of all. Our Church consisting of 6 families and C.B.C.A. and M. consisting of 22 families are contributing Rs. 1000/- and Rs. 5000/- respectively for the erection of the

Church building. And the Executive Committee of the latter has very liberally recommended that the land and the Church building be invested in the Assam Diocesan Trust Association of C. I. P. B. C.

I am most delighted with this recommendation as it embodies the good will we have been able to foster among these two Churches.

I may be forgiven to imply a personal note here, but there is no doubt that this is the fruit of personal contact and Christian Charity which is expected to transcend all narrow denominationalism, we praise God that He has graciously bestowed upon us the mind of Christ, and pray that He may continue to lead us to grow closer together.

### The Need for Church Union

There is no doubt that Church Union movement in India has been the spontaneous growth of the leading of the Holy Spirit. The Christians in India have come to feel that the sharp denominational barriers which divide us—a minority in a non-Christian country—are not pertinent to our situation.

The Communication of the emphasis on a particular aspect in the West has created two hindrances in the natural and healthy development of the Church in India.

1. We have failed to learn "The Whole Christ" of the New Testament. Sometimes preaching of the Gospel to us has been limited to the denominational teaching and has turned us into 'Anglican' 'Baptist' 'Presbyterian' 'Lutheran' etc.

We have tried to explain to non-Christian friends that our faith is of Eastern Origin, and they have acknowledged it; but still point out that the "Shape of Christianity" in India is limited by western theological back-ground. It is surprising how much they know about the historical intolerance of Christianity in the West; and present denominations are a reminder to them of that unhappy area of Church History, which blunts the message of the Gospel of peace.

If Christianity is to become indigenous something must be done to remove such limitations.

2. Most of the Churches in Assam have been decreased to the minimum of foreign personnel and financial help during the last

ten years. And, as we are well aware, it is not always possible to find Indian leaders to fill all the places thus vacated or supplement the decreased grants, hence Leadership in every Church is weakened and financial resources poor.

One of the ways to over-come this problem is to make it possible that the Indian Christian leadership available, in various denominations, may be able to co-operate and thus mutually help to carry on the task with decreased personnel and finance.

Also in most places various Churches' work and field overlap, only a united Church will remedy this. At present, sometimes a minister has to travel miles to reach a few scattered sheep of his fold, while a minister of another denomination is resident in the

area, and has a large flourishing Congregation. If 'a few scattered' would have fellowship with 'the flourishing Congregation', they will be greatly strengthened in their spiritual and community life and become an effective witness in that area.

We Christians in India and in every State are in a minority, and even then it is not possible for us to join our forces together so as to preserve our strength.

Here in Assam we have found co-operation very helpful through the Assam Christian Council, but as the Church in Assam becomes dependent more and more upon indigenous resources—financial and personnel, we shall need something more intimate to bind us together—Is not the Plan of Church Union in North India and Pakistan to foster that intimate relationship?

## ELDERS

REV. H. P. CROMIE

**A**T the eighth General Assembly of the United Church of Northern India, held at Ajmer in 1944, 'it was resolved that the following resolution with regard to Elders and their election be referred to the Church Councils for their opinion.'

(i) Elders should be elected for a period of five years, (though where the practice of life-eldership is in vogue and is working satisfactorily it should be continued).

(ii) The provisions....on page 18 of the Blue-Book regarding scrutiny of the piety, prudence, knowledge, and general fitness of those elected should be observed.

(iii) If a person is UNANIMOUSLY elected for a second period of five years he should thereby become a Life-Elder.

(iv) If a person is elected for a third period of five years he should thereby become a Life-Elder.

At the ninth meeting, held at Allahabad in 1947 it was resolved :-

1. That the General Assembly reiterate its reminder that the choice of elders is a sacred

and solemn function of the Congregation to be discharged in the fear of God.

2. That even where there are Life-Elders their number should not be allowed to diminish the number of term-Elders.

3. That the term of appointment be AT LEAST three years. (Capitals mine)

What was the position in our Church then and why did the Assembly consider such legislation desirable?

In 1947 the Commission on 'The Government and Administration of the Church' reported that,

(i) Some congregations have only Life Elders ;

(ii) Some congregations have only Term-Elders ;

(iii) Some congregations have a few Life-Elders ;

(iv) Some congregations elect the Elder for a term of one year, some for three years and there are other variations.

Experience had shown that in some congregations where an election was held every year

it was a constant source of faction and unrest in the Church. In order to avoid this annual election-fever and its attendant ills and after-effects it was decided that the election should be for a period of at least three years. It should be noted that the office of the Elder was not questioned and that the trend of opinion was towards lengthening, where necessary, the term of service with a view to getting greater stability and peace in the government and administration of the local congregations. It is noteworthy, too that this came as a result of over twenty years experience in United Church with a variety of traditions and practice. Rightly or wrongly it seems to many people that since that time there has been a swing away from that position and that it is necessary to draw attention again to the place and value of the Eldership in the life of the Church. Some ministers frankly regard Elders as a nuisance—not without reason—and wish to be rid of them. On the other hand many a minister has been saved from folly and his work enriched by the advice and fellowship of wise and devout Elders. Such unpleasant or pleasant personal experiences should not decide our attitude to anything, not least the Elder and the Bishop! That is the way to make our present confusion more confounded.

The present position in our Church demonstrates clearly one fact: that in the Reformed Churches there has been no consistent view held of the origin and status of the Elder. During the last few centuries there has been discussion as to whether the Elders are the successors of the Elders of the Jewish Synagogue or not; whether they are Presbyters of the same 'order' as Pastors but having a different function: 'ruling' as distinct from 'teaching' (see U. C. N. I. Review, August, 1956, p. 175!); whether they are 'ordained' as distinct from 'lay'; whether they can ever preside over any court of the Church or not; whether even their office has any divine sanction or any basis in Scripture or not. Presbyterians do not agree among themselves as to the answer to any of these questions. I am not going to attempt to give an answer to any of them. What is of more immediate importance is the fact that in spite of differences of opinion about these things there is general agreement concerning the work of the Elder. It is stated in our own Blue-Book as follows:—'The Elders, in

association with the Minister, shall be responsible for the spiritual care, oversight and governance of the Congregation. They shall help to maintain order in the house of God, assist the Minister in the administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and in visitation of the Congregation..... ..

Whatever their status, whatever the length of their appointment may be, whether they be ordained or lay—that is their work. Calvin in his Institutes, IV. iii. 8 wrote:—In giving the name of bishops, presbyters and pastors, indiscriminately to those who govern churches, I have done it on the authority of Scripture, which uses the words as synonymous. .... . Here it is to be observed, that we have hitherto enumerated those offices only which consist in the ministry of the Word; nor does Paul make mention of any others in the passage which we have quoted from the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians. But in the Epistle to the Romans and the First Epistle to the Corinthians, he enumerates other offices, as powers, gifts of healing, interpretation, government, care of the poor (Romans xii, 7 : 1Cor. xii, 28). As to those which were temporary, I say nothing .... . But there are two of perpetual duration—viz. government and care of the poor. By these governors I understand seniors selected from the people to unite with the bishops in pronouncing censures and exercising discipline. .... . From the beginning, therefore, each church had its senate, composed of pious, grave, and venerable men, in whom was lodged the power of correcting faults. .... . Moreover, experience shows that this arrangement was not confined to any one age and therefore we are to regard the office of government as necessary for all ages.' And in Book IV. xi. 1 he writes of those who had 'power of jurisdiction' and 'who were joined with pastors in the spiritual government of the church.'

In 1653 Alexander Ross, an Episcopalian who had been chaplain to Charles I, wrote in his *pansebela* or 'A view of all Religions':

Q. Are laymen excluded from Church Government because they are Laymen?

A. No; for though they be no part of the Clergy, yet they are a part of the Church, and members of Christ's mystical body, as well as the Clergy. And it is for the Clergies' advantage, that there be Lay-Rulers; for by these means, the Ministers are eased of much trouble, and they are backed with the greater

power ; besides they are less obnoxious to envy and opposition, which the ROMISH Clergy have brought upon themselves by excluding the laity from Church government, proudly monopolising all to themselves. Lastly, many Clergy men, though good Scholars, yet are indiscreet in their carriage and unskilful in matters of government.'

Further on he adds :

' Ministers shall have more time to study, and to follow their preaching better, if they be taken off from the trouble of ruling ; and God who giveth to divers men divers gifts, and not the same to all men, hath made some fitter for preaching, others fitter for ruling.' Quoted from, 'What is an Elder ?' by J. M. Ross)

Disciplinary control among the Jews was exercised by a body of 'Elders' and in the Christian Church, from the earliest days the need for those who could exercise spiritual discipline was felt. That this was from God, who can doubt ? As Ross pointed out God giveth to divers men divers gifts.' He still does. In our own age there is perhaps a more widespread understanding of this than ever before. Within the Church increasing emphasis is laid on the place of the layman. For the peace and good governance of the Church it is more necessary than ever that others should be joined with pastors in its spiritual oversight.

The Elder's Office, as we have known it, is one of grave responsibility, of historic and even more so, of contemporary significance : an office for the exercise of which 'pious' grave and venerable men' are needed. They need not, of course, be lacking in a sense of humour or in the tenderness and understand-

ing of our Lord nor need they all be over fifty years of age !

In the Plan of Union, it is true that provision is made for the continuance of this office where it already exists but their is no real indication of any appreciation of its value or significance. Such a 'senate', such a 'session', such a body of pious, prudent and responsible men as the good of the Church requires is not likely to be got by annual elections to a Pastorate Committee. For the filling of such an office, as the Elders should be, something more dignified than an annual election often is, is required. Some greater permanance of responsibility and position should be attached to it.

Our General Assembly in 1944 and in 1947 did well to re'emphasize the need for 'scrutiny of the piety, prudence, knowledge and general fitness of those elected' and to draw attention again to the 'sacred and solemn function' of the Congregation in selecting Elders.

We should not allow differences of opinion such as I have stated to exist to blind us to the necessity of such an office in the Church and if some sessions and congregations have not properly understood or exercised their responsibilities and if, as a result of that, unworthy men have been elected as Elders, the remedy lies not in abolishing the office or lessening its importance but in seeking more worthily to fill it. The office of the Elder as we have known it in the Presbyterian Church has been of untold value in maintaining sound spiritual discipline and as Ross wrote, by its means 'the ministers ....are backed with greater Power.'

If this office is not more adequately preserved in the United Church than the present Plan indicates that it may be, something of great value to the whole Church will be lost.

### A Prayer for the Unity of the Church.

Across the frontiers of language and race and nation, unite us, Lord Jesus.

Across our ignorances, our prejudices, our native antipathies, unite us, Lord Jesus.

Across our intellectual and spiritual barriers, unite us, Lord Jesus.

O God, that there may be one flock and one Shepherd, gather together Thy scattered folk. Amen.

## Letter to the Editor

### DIFFERENCES ABOUT BAPTISM

Dear Sir,

In the August number of 'Church Union News and Views', Mr. Wenger comments on my article which appeared in your May issue. Despite his plea that I should try to convince my fellow-Baptists through some other medium than your journal, I should like to ask for one further opportunity to clarify my position.

My previous article was intended not only to convince Baptists, but also to show others that Baptist participation in the North India plan of union should not necessarily involve difficulties over baptism. I am, of course, well aware that, 'freedom of conscience' may not be equated with 'maintaining one's rights' but I am equally certain that that distinction is not always recognized in practice. Mr. Wenger emphasizes Baptist principles, but he also concedes that these are not always the same as Baptist practice.

I cannot agree with Mr. Wenger in the last paragraph of his letter, since he there implies that the united Church will not really be united in its basic convictions concerning the nature of Baptism (quite apart from modes of administration). I fail to see the inconsistency of talking about 'the conscience of the Church' when the Plan clearly states that "the Church holds that there is but one Baptism which is therefore unrepeatable in the life of any one person, no matter by which practice it was administered." (Amendments 1955, p. 7)

I do not see how anyone who takes union seriously can claim the rights as Baptists have undeniably claimed in practice, to deny the validity of the baptism of those baptized in infancy. Since membership in full standing in the united Church will only apply to those "who have been baptized with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit", Baptists entering into union with other Christians can hardly avoid recognizing the validity of the baptism of their fellow Church-members who were baptized in infancy.

Whether one holding the views which I have expressed may more fittingly be called a 'liberal' Baptist or merely a Baptist who takes the provisions of the plan of union seriously, I leave to you, Sir, to decide,

Yours sincerely,

B. F. Price

Serampore College

#### Copies of the Plan :

It is most unfortunate that the supply of the second edition of the Plan of Union is completely exhausted. Until the third edition has been approved by the Negotiating Committee the only form in which fresh copies of the Plan may be obtained consists of a few mimeographed copies of the Draft Re-arrangement as this was submitted to the Continuation Committee in October 1956, together with sheets containing the amendments approved at that meeting. This document incorporates all the changes made up to the present, and persons who urgently require copies may write to the Secretary of the Negotiating Committee, the Very Rev. A. Ralla Ram, D. D., Jumna, Allahabad, U. P.

Arrangements are being made however, to have the third edition set up and printed in galley-proof form before the Negotiating Committee meets, in order that the booklet itself may be available with the least possible delay after the meeting early in April 1957.

It would be helpful if persons who are likely to require the third edition in quantity would write to the publishers, C. L. S., Post Box 501, Park Town, Madras 3 stating their probable requirements.

# Book Review

**Praying for Unity:** Olive Wyon: S. P. C. K. Kashmere Gate, P.O. Box 1585, Delhi. 12 annas.

**Praying for Unity:** Book II: The Christian Year: Olive Wyon: S. P. C. K., Rs. 1/2/-

**Special Intercessions for the Unity of the Church:** S. P. C. K., 1 anna

The first of Olive Wyon's two little Books is very good indeed, and deserves wide circulation among our churches. It would do the theologians good to read it, to remind them of the place where Church Union negotiations must begin; and the non-theologians could learn from it wherein the heart of the matter lies.

In discussing the problem of the unity of the Church, Miss Wyon goes right to the very root of the matter in the title of her Introduction "God alone can create unity". She begins by reminding us of the great moments we all have experienced when, in worship together with fellow-Christians of other denominations we have felt the power of the Holy Spirit and rejoiced in our oneness in Christ; and yet, as she goes on to remark, how often great Conferences during which we have felt our oneness in Christ, have ended in an anti-climax, because we have gone our separate ways to participate in sectional communion services.

The present writer has always felt that intercommunion ought to precede organic union. The theological arguments put forward against this point of view may be theoretically sound, but surely there is something lacking in our desire for union as long as we are not prepared to open the Table of our Lord to all. Miss Wyon quotes from Oliver Thomkins "The Wholeness of the Church": "I cannot ignore a fellow-Christian without ignoring Christ". Yet it is only too obvious that very few of us have really come to the point of admitting that members of other denominations are as fully Christian as the members of our own denomination. Whatever we say, we do in fact treat other servants of Christ as less than Christian.

The author goes on to suggest that the only power which can overcome the barriers we have erected between ourselves and our brothers and sisters in Christ, is the power of prayer. It is certainly true that most of the occasions when we have been very conscious of our unity have been in meetings specially called for united prayer. In the great cities of India during the weeks before the coming of Dr. Billy Graham, prayer meetings were held which surpassed anything which had ever been seen before in those cities. The atmosphere of expectancy which prevailed was powerful enough to break down all barriers, and as we sought God's blessing on Dr. Graham's work, we forgot our old differences and knew ourselves to be members of the one holy and catholic Church. Unfortunately, it was not long before we again slipped back into our old ways. May God help us in these final days of Church Union discussions to come together in prayer; not merely Baptists praying with Baptists for guidance in respect of Church Union, but Baptists praying with Anglicans, and Methodists praying with Presbyterians—all of us praying for God's guidance together. Then, and only then, as Miss Wyon suggests, shall we achieve the kind of unity which can create a united Church.

In the second part of her book, Miss Wyon has collected together a series of prayers for Church Union, arranged for use on the main festivals of the Christian Year. The form and content of these prayers are of the high quality which one would expect of Miss Wyon. But, all the same, one cannot help feeling that, taking the book as a whole, the prayer for unity is often artificially inserted into the prayers which we normally use on these days. The prayer for Christian unity is one which we should be constantly offering—on that we all agree, but the present reviewer found himself getting rather impatient as he read through this book of prayers. It is so easy to become unreal in a thing like this, and this little book has not quite escaped that danger.

The pamphlet issued by the C. I. B. C.

"Special Intercessions for the Unity of the Church" was first printed in 1944 against the background of Church Union negotiations in South India. Even so, it is still fresh and useable, and ministers who are seeking

to educate their people on the subject of Church Union will be able to use these prayers to great advantage.

E. G. T. MADGE.

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REV. E. L. WENGER, M. A., B. D., is a member of the staff of Serampore College, and is the leader of the Baptist delegation on the Negotiating Committee.

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## Proposed Services for the Inauguration of Union

Certain changes have been made in the proposed Services for the Inauguration of Union etc. In accordance with amendments to the plan. In addition a draft Order of Service for the Ordination of Presbyters is under scrutiny, and it is hoped that a booklet containing all these Orders of Service will be published by the middle of 1957. This Booklet will supersede the one which has been on sale for the last two years or so.





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